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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
Verlag Barbara Budrich

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Lauterbach, W., & Pillemer, K. (2001). Social structure and the family: a United States - Germany comparison of residential proximity between parents and adult children. *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, 13(1), 68-88. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-291052>

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Social Structure and the Family: A United States – Germany Comparison of Residential Proximity Between Parents and Adult Children¹

Die räumliche Entfernung zwischen Eltern und dem nächstwohnenden Kind: Ein Vergleich zwischen den USA und Deutschland

Zusammenfassung

In der zweiten Lebenshälfte ist die räumliche Entfernung zwischen Eltern und einem ihrer erwachsenen Kinder von entscheidender Bedeutung für die Erbringung von alltagspraktischen Hilfeleistungen. Der vorliegende Aufsatz widmet sich der Frage, in welcher Entfernung vom Haushalt der Eltern das nächstwohnende erwachsene Kind lebt. Wir betrachten diese Frage für die USA und für Deutschland. Nur durch einen Ländervergleich wird ersichtlich, ob sich vergleichbare Mobilitätsfaktoren unterschiedlich auf die Wohnentfernung auswirken. Mit Hilfe der Daten des Sozio-ökonomischen Panels und des National Survey of Families and Households zeigen wir, dass die Entfernung zu den Eltern maßgeblich durch die Bildungsqualifikation und den beruflichen Status der Kinder beeinflusst wird. Ebenso durch Lebenslaufeffekte und kritische Familienereignisse etwa eine Scheidung oder eine Verwitwung. Unterschiedlich nahe leben Söhne und Töchter. Letztere leben meist näher und bei familialen Krisen wird die Entfernung vornehmlich zwischen ihnen und ihren Eltern geringer.

Schlagworte: Familie, Generationen, späte Familienphase, internationaler Vergleich, räumliche Entfernung.

Abstract

The geographical proximity between parents and their adult children is conducted in a cross-national analysis. We propose a theoretical framework in which we view the process of residential decisions as resulting from a conflict between the dependency needs of family members, life cycle positions and the occupational opportunities offered by labor market. We use comparable national data sets on the United States and Germany to address the question of whether the determinants of geographical distance between the generations differ in the two countries. As predicted, educational and occupational attainment was positively related to geographical distance between the generations. Further, life cycle factors emerged as important predictors, with persons in middle age are most likely to live farther away from parents than either older or younger children. However, major cross-

1 We would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their helpful detailed comments.

national differences in predictors of geographical proximity were not found.

Keywords: Family, generations, late family period, international comparison, residential proximity.

1. Introduction

Over the past century, two notable social trends occurred in all developed industrial countries, which have had profound effects on intergenerational relations. First, striking changes have occurred in the demographic structure that have led to an aging society (Watkins, Menken & Bongaarts, 1987; Baltes et al., 1996). Longevity at birth has doubled within the last 150 years. The lengthened life span has in turn led to a greater common lifetime between parents and children; current cohorts can expect to spend more years occupying intergenerational roles than ever before in history (Uhlenberg, 1980; Lauterbach, 1995). Population aging has also contributed to the rise of an „empty nest“ phase, which now typically occupies 20-25 years, or 25 to 35 percent of the total lifespan (Lauterbach, 1999). Given declining fertility and closer spacing of children, family life that involves non-coresident parents and adult children often equals or exceeds the period of active parenting. The importance of the transformation becomes clear, when we consider that at the end of the last century the empty nest phase averaged approximately one year.

The second development concerns the massive shift in intergenerational residential patterns. The proportion of late middle-aged and elderly persons who live alone has dramatically increased, and households in which parents live with children have decreased (Kobrin, 1976; Ruggles, 1996; Hareven & Uhlenberg, 1995; Pillemer & Suitor, 1998). Indeed, at the turn of the century it was normative for older persons – and particularly elderly widows – to live with kin, whereas in contemporary society, the majority live alone in their own household. Among elderly persons who are divorced, separated or widowed, the proportion living alone has increased sixfold since the end of the last century. The decrease in coresidence has occurred despite the aforementioned fact that parents share a longer common lifetime with their children than ever before and that the current aged cohort has a relatively high average number of living children (Himes, 1992).

These demographic trends and their policy implications have led to a proliferation of sociological work on coresidence of parents and adult children, both in the United States and in Europe (Suitor & Pillemer, 1988; Crimmins & Ingegneri, 1990; Mutchler & Burr, 1991; Kohli et al., 1997; Lauterbach, 1998; Szydlik, 2000). Indeed, a lot of discussions of intergenerational living arrangements in the United States focus exclusively on whether the generations share a residence. For example, in perhaps the most comprehensive examination of census data elderly population, living arrangements are discussed only in the context of household composition (Siegel, 1993).

In our view, the major concentration on intergenerational residence-sharing is potentially misleading. Specifically, it downplays the importance of the more lengthy and much more common situation in which family generations live apart

during the period after children have left the parental home. We would argue that a lot of children and parents constitute a form of living arrangements, that can be understood in the terms „intimacy by distance“ (Rosenmayr & Rosenmayr, 1978). Thus we would like to address the following question: After the departure from the parental home, what factors lead adult children to live near their parents or to move further away from them?

Further, this issue is a particularly fruitful one for international comparison. Residential decisions on the part of parents and adult children are affected by a variety of factors, several of which we discuss below. In this article, we propose a theoretical framework in which we view the process of residential decisions as resulting from a conflict between the structure of the family on one hand, the level of educational and the occupational status a person holds on the other (higher educated people migrate more often than lower educated persons). This framework suggests that characteristics of nations, the labor markets and the educational system, will affect family members at various points in the life course and influence their decisions regarding residence.

We will use a comparison between the United States and Germany as a method of exploring the role of national institutions in determining the residential structure of families. Specifically, we examine differences in geographical proximity between parents and adult children using two comparable national data sets. Based on the theoretical framework, we address the question of whether the determinants of geographical distance between the generations differ in the two countries. Further, we examine mechanisms that are responsible for intercountry differences, including educational and life cycle factors.

2. Theoretical perspective

The existing literature clearly demonstrates that most adults in both the United States and Germany are invested in lifelong intergenerational relationships and intergenerational solidarity, although they may no longer live in a joint household (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein, Lawton & Bengtson, 1994; Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994; Schütze, 1989, 1993; Bertram, 1996, 1996a; Szydlík, 2000). The powerful intergenerational relationships and the normative structure could be predicted to lead to geographically close living arrangements. Because families are structured around authority over and responsibility for persons. Especially at certain points in the life course, there are members who are economically or physically dependent on other family members. „A person can be fully independent some of the time, and partly independent all of the time, but cannot be fully independent all of the time. Because this is so, some institutions are necessary in every society to take responsibility for dependent persons – the old, the young, the sick, the infirm, and those otherwise unable to maintain themselves“ (Coleman, 1982, p. 125).

Children depend on parents for nurturance and economic support in the early stages of life, and parents in old age depend on their children for support and assis-

tance in the period when parents began to become frail. It is clear from the research on families in later life that families are still normatively (and sometimes legally) required to assist dependent members, even when they are adults. Thus, a defining characteristic of the family is its attention to such dependency needs as they change over the life course. Intergenerational solidarity, has been found to exist in very stable patterns in both the United States and Germany over the past several decades.

Nevertheless, we concur that the demands of the family are strongly counterbalanced at certain points in the life course. Numerous researchers have identified the countervailing pull of demands and responsibilities from sources external to the family, especially by the educational system and the labor market, expressed in the pressures of the job market (Moen, 1992; Huinink, 1997).

This leads us to a fundamental hypothesis: Decisions on the part of both generations – parents and children – regarding residential proximity to one another take place in the context of competition between the demands of the family solidarity on the one hand, and the demands of the labor market, on the other. The individual, as a member of a family, is called upon to act responsibly on behalf of economically or physically dependent members at certain points in the life course. At those life stages, we hypothesize that the generations will be more likely to live in closer proximity to one another. However, the individual who responds to the family's demands is also embedded in, and affected by, the pressures of the labor markets. When these organisations make their most serious demands (for example, the need to move in order to be employed by such an organization), the generations will be more likely to live at a greater distance from one another.

2.1 Comparison of the United States and Germany

In addition to our goal of shedding light on general predictors of residential proximity, we also wish to conduct an international comparison of these predictors. Previous research has not addressed the question of cross-national differences in the dynamics of geographical proximity. However, we argue that characteristics of societies may have an impact on the conflict we have identified between the family and the demands of the educational system and the labor market.

Findings about geographical distance between parents and children for Germany clearly demonstrates that in most families, at least one child live relatively close to the parents. This result contradicts the general assumption, that Germany is a society based on high mobility rates. Szydlik (2000, p. 90) found that six out of ten parents between the age of 40 to 85 who have adult children living outside the parental home have at least one child living in the same town. Half of the parents of the respondents also live in the same town. And 80 percent live within a two hour drive from the parents (vgl. Kohli et. al, 1997). Results for the 1980s show that approximately 21 percent of parents, children and grandparents live in the neighbourhood (Bien & Marbach, 1991, p. 32; Bien, 1996, p. 34).

For the United States new findings for the second half of the 1980s suggest that even 20 to 30 year olds – those who have the highest mobility rates – typically

move only within the same state. Only 20 percent switched their residence between states; thus approximately 80 percent had only local moves (Farley, 2000, p. 315). Among persons over 60 years of age, the proportion of non-movers is approximately 80 percent and those who only have within-state migrations is about 15 to 18 percent. Thus only 5 percent leave the state of residence.

Thus, it appears that the generations within families in both countries live apart, but in general near to one another. Indeed, such arrangements have been prevalent throughout history. Hareven (1995) notes that the aged frequently maintained autonomous households, but that this autonomy was dependent on the proximity of relatives. Indeed, this was the situation most elderly people preferred: „The ideal was proximity in residence in the same land in rural areas or in the same building or the same neighborhood in urban areas“ (Hareven, 1995, p. 18).

However, Germany has retained characteristics that distinguish it from the United States, and that may affect the factors that lead the generations will live near to one another. From our theoretical perspective, the most important contrast between the U.S. and Germany lies in differing approaches to social welfare. Specifically, we suggest that Germany provides a number of safeguards that first reduce the impact of economic and physical dependency of adults on the family, and second reduce the impact of the labor market (in particular employers) on the lives of individuals.

The German system balances the market economy with rights for workers and social guarantees. A hallmark of this system is its commitment to persons who are unable to compete in the workplace. Thus in Germany, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, the unemployed must be compensated through a secondary income distribution system based on the principles of social security and social justice (Langguth, 1995, p. 107).

In the United States, in contrast, analysts of all political orientations have characterized the system as a truncated, often incoherent welfare state, where the percentage of social welfare spending compared to the gross national product is comparatively low (Esping-Andersen, 1990). At the risk of oversimplification, the differences in social welfare provision between Germany and the United States are striking. The United States system is not centrally organized, and the emphasis on the provision of a decent standard of living at every phase of the life course is not as strong as in Germany. Thus, social welfare provision in Germany is institutional, whereas in the United States it is residual. German society relies on unemployment insurance, health insurance, and other social assistance programs, rather than primarily on families or on the market to care for dependent individuals².

Given this generally accepted distinction, the question arises: How will these features affect the dynamics of residential proximity, especially when parents are in the later phases of life? As we discuss in the following section, we anticipate that these differences will lead the predictors of proximity to be less important in Germany than in the United States. We hypothesize that the social welfare system

2 The work of Esping-Andersen (1990, p. 52) shows quantitatively this difference between the USA and Germany. Looking at a rank order score of welfare states in terms of all combined de-commodification, Germany has a score of 27.7 and the USA 13.8.

moderate the conflict between the family and the labor market (Siaroff, 1994). In a nation that responds to dependency needs more through mechanisms of public solidarity (institutions) than individual resources, there should be less of a need to move closer to other family members when confronted with personal difficulties. These public institutions are of critical importance during life course transitions, such as when family members become frail in old age or when young adults require support to get a university degree. In the following section, we present specific hypotheses regarding the factors we expect to influence geographical proximity between parents and children. In each case, we also propose hypotheses regarding differences between the United States and Germany in these factors.

2.2 Hypotheses

The existing literature allows us to suggest several basic processes that may affect the geographical distance between generations. The degree of geographical separation can be seen as the result of the mobility of both generations. Either parents, or adult children, or both can migrate after the launching phase, which then produces the distance between the two households. In our discussion here, we will concentrate primarily on the reasons for children's migration, which are, of course, in part tied to parent-related factors. In so doing, we follow Lin and Rogerson, whose review of the literature indicated that „it is adult children who contribute most to generational dispersion“ (1995, p. 307). The existing literature suggests for both countries three major factors that are likely to figure prominently as predictors: 1) family life-course stages, 2) life events that affect dependency, and 3) educational and labor market related factors.

Family life course stages

Families progress through a number of predictable stages as their members move through the life course. Silverstein et al. (1995) suggest that these changes reflect developmental needs of both parents and children as they age. Young adults are faced with demands of establishing their independence; in these tasks, they are likely to need parents' emotional and instrumental support. In midlife, when the need for assistance diminishes, children may become more socially distanced. Finally, when parents need support, children may become closer to parents.

This progression of stages has an impact on mobility of both generations. As Rossi argued from his studies of reasons for moving that „the major social characteristics distinguishing mobile from stable households were variables closely related to the family life cycle“ (1995, p. 6). Previous research indicates that over the life course, age and stage in the family life cycle help determine the geographical distance between parents and children (Silverstein et al., 1994; Frick, 1996). Three phases of the family life cycle are particularly relevant:

The first phase involves the child's separation from the parental home and the establishment of a new household. In both the United States and Germany, this transition typically begins at the end of the second decade of the child's life and

continues into the middle of the third decade (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1993; Ziegler & Schladt, 1993; Menaghan & Parcel, 1995). During this stage, children are likely to continue to rely on parents for instrumental and material help, as well as emotional support (Silverstein et al., 1994). This stage represents the beginning of the process of intergenerational mobility, but it can be hypothesized that the geographical distance between the generations in this phase will not be great. To the extent that it occurs, likely reasons are to obtain specialized academic training, or obtain employment that is not available locally.

In the second phase (beginning in the child's late twenties), mobility is likely to increase, because dependency between the generations is at its lowest level (Kulis, 1991; Lin & Rogerson, 1995). The younger generation must respond to the demands of the labor market, represented by companies and organizations, and be occupationally mobile. Further, becoming married may loosen emotional ties to parents, because the loyalty to parental home switches to the partner. In this stage of the life course, parents are relatively young and usually in good health. Thus, mobility is likely to increase in this phase, because parents and children are less dependent on one another, and the exigencies of the job market can force children to relocate.

The third phase (beginning in the middle forties for the children) involves several factors that are likely to bring family ties into focus, and lead back to closer residential proximity. As the now elderly parents leave the labor force, they may choose to move closer to their children, particularly if there are grandchildren. In the later part of this period, increasing fragility on the part of parents can lead to the need for instrumental and emotional support, including hands-on caregiving. Direct caregiving can only take place in a context of geographical proximity, thus leading the generations to move closer to one another. This configuration corresponds to the second stage of Litwak and Longino's (1987) well-known late-life course typology, in which moving close to kin resolves dependency needs. Considerable research indicates that poor health, combined with declining income, can lead the elderly to migrate close to children, or, in rarer cases the reverse (Bradsher et al., 1992; Serow, 1992; Sommers & Rowell, 1992; Warnes, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 1993).

Hypothesis 1.1: Geographical distance will be greatest in middle age, and lower among persons under 30 and over 60 years of age.

U.S. – Germany comparative hypothesis. The standard three-stage pattern discussed above could be less pronounced in a society in which the needs of dependent members were more heavily provided for by the state. Specifically, we expect to find a stronger relationship between the stage of the family life cycle and residential proximity in the United States than in Germany. Greater financial support in Germany for students (including the absence of tuition payments), and a clearer transition between school and work (via apprenticeship programs) are hypothesized to create lower levels of dependency on the family. Further, in Germany considerable expenditures are devoted to income transfer programs that typically guarantee a reasonable minimum income to all citizens (Burkhauser et al., 1991), and unemployment benefits are considerably more generous than in the

United States. Therefore, young people who are having difficulties in the job market are still less easily able to remain independent of the family than in the United States.

In the middle phase of the family life cycle, the model predicts greater geographical distance between the generations. We hypothesize that this will occur to a greater extent in the United States than in Germany. The United States has higher rates of job mobility than Germany, and pressures to move are therefore more intense (Allmendinger, 1989). Further, the amount of involuntary worker displacement (for example through layoffs) is much greater in the United States, due to strong legal mechanisms that protect workers in Germany. Job transfers are also much more limited in Germany. Based on this evidence, we assume the pull provided by employers is less great in Germany, leading us to predict a less dramatic shift toward greater distance during this life cycle phase.

In the third phase of the life course, Germany's greater protection of dependent persons suggests that mobility related to the needs of elderly parents will be less pronounced. Empirical studies show, that the mobility in Germany in old age is very low. On average more than 50 percent of the 55 to 69 years old live longer than 25 years in the same flat or house (Motel et al., 2000). Concerning the children around 80 percent of them do have parents in the same village, close to them (Kohli et. al., 1997). In general, Germany's social assistance program provides income to individuals who cannot provide themselves with a decent standard of living (Kappelhoff & Teckenberg, 1987). The elderly in particular receive substantially greater protection from income loss than in the United States. As Burkhauser, Duncan and Hauser (1994, p. 157) note, the „very high first tier of social security protection in Germany substantially reduces the risk of persistent poverty in Germany among the elderly“. Beyond standard pensions, the elderly are eligible to receive social assistance payments when their pensions or incomes are too small to allow a reasonable standard of living.

Hypothesis 1.2: For the United States we predict that the relationship between child's age and geographical proximity will resemble an inverted U-shaped curve, where the generations will live closest to each other in the first and third stages. In Germany, however, we expect the curve to be relatively flat, given greater social protection for dependent persons, and limitations placed on the amount of demands employers are able to make on individuals.

Life Events

Parallel to this relatively simple three-fold division of the later life course, critical life course events can affect the structure of the family, which in turn may affect geographical proximity. In the parental generation, widowhood is one such critical event that can be hypothesized to affect geographic proximity between the generations. Although the evidence is somewhat mixed, research in both the United States and Germany indicates that after widowhood, the ties between the surviving parent and his or her children become stronger (Friedrich, 1994; Dannenbeck,

1995). Adult children are more likely to provide assistance to widowed than to married parents (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; O'Bryant & Hansson, 1995; Lapota, 1996). In the United States there is some evidence that widowed persons are more likely to make assistance-related moves late in life (Rogers, 1988; Crimmins & Ingeneri, 1990; Serow, 1992), often toward their children.

In the child generation, divorce may affect intergenerational proximity. Following a divorce, mothers in particular are likely to need both instrumental assistance and emotional support. Rossi and Rossi (1990) found that divorced adult children received more support from parents than did married offspring. The need for support could promote children moving closer to parents following marital dissolution (DeWit & Frankel, 1988).

Hypothesis 2.1: Closer proximity will exist when parents are widowed.

Hypothesis 2.2: Closer proximity will exist when children are divorced (and especially divorced with children).

U.S. – Germany comparative hypotheses. The social differences between the United States and Germany discussed under the family life cycle lead to similar predictions regarding widowhood and divorce. As noted above, greater protection against impoverishment is provided to widows in Germany. We therefore hypothesize that widowhood will be a weaker predictor of residential proximity in Germany than in the United States. Regarding divorce, protections against income loss for divorced women are also greater in Germany. Divorced mothers with husbands who are delinquent in child support are eligible for social assistance payments. Therefore, although the evidence is somewhat less clear, we predict that child's divorce will have a weaker relationship to proximity in the United States, even when the divorced parents have children.

Hypothesis 2.3: Widowhood will predict geographical proximity in the United States, but not in Germany.

Hypothesis 2.4: Divorce will predict geographical proximity in the United States, but not in Germany.

Education and labor market factors

Although comparative data do not exist, studies that have examined either the United States or Germany generally show that with increasing education, children are more likely to move further away from parents (Wagner, 1989; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Bengtson & Harootyan, 1994; Lin & Rogerson, 1995; Frick, 1996; Lauterbach, 1998). This is in part due to the educational decision-making process; to undertake specialized advanced study, a young person may have to relocate to where such training is available (Schäfers, 1997). Further, the exigencies of the labor market also make it more likely that children with higher educational levels will move further away. The distribution of corporate actors may not match that of young professionals seeking jobs. As Blau and Duncan (1967) point out, migration provides the mechanism for adjusting the geographical distribution of workers

with the geographical distribution of work opportunities. Thus, if there is a large discrepancy between the labor supply and the occupational structure in a region, migration is used to overcome this difference. Therefore the location of the employer and the location of family of origin constitute an essential dimension of residential proximity between parents and their adult children in later life.

These dynamics are especially important in high-status occupations that rely on better-educated individuals. Although blue collar jobs are likely to be available throughout the country, the number of suitable positions for persons with higher educational attainment are relatively scarce and are likely to be concentrated in core cities and urban regions. Employers in the labor market which offer occupations where high qualifications are needed are relatively rare. Further, there is a clear relationship between career mobility dynamics and migration. Upward mobility is more available to better-educated people in the labor market if they are willing to move (Schlottmann & Herzog, 1984; Wagner, 1989a).

Finally, because educational attainment is strongly correlated with higher income, financial dependency on parents is likely to be lower, especially in the area of daily support (Avery, Goldscheider & Speare, 1992; Lin & Rogerson, 1995). Based on this body of evidence, it is likely that adult children with a high educational level have the highest risk of moving far away from the parents. Because there is a strong tendency for residential decisions to be made based on the husband's employment situation, we expect that occupational attainment will be a stronger predictor for men than for women.

Hypothesis 3.1: Persons with a college/university degree will be more likely to live farther away from parents. This factor will be most strongly related to geographical distance among men.

U.S.-Germany comparative hypotheses. Because of the relative scarcity of highly-skilled jobs in both countries, it is likely that obtaining a university education will be related to geographical separation in both countries. However, we expect that being more highly educated will more strongly predict distance from parents in the United States. Specifically, Germany provides much greater protection from downsizing at the corporate level, so involuntary job loss among professionals is lower.

Hypothesis 3.2: Higher educational level and occupational status will be more strongly predictive of geographical distance in the United States than in Germany.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Data and Research Design

The analysis draws on data for Germany from the German Socioeconomic Panel (GSOEP), a longitudinal representative study of households and individuals in the

former West Germany and, since reunification in 1990, the former East Germany (Schupp & Wagner, 1995). Data collection began in 1984 and has continued on an annual basis through the fourteenth wave, collected in 1997. The 1984 sample included 5921 households and 12245 persons for a participation rate of 65 percent. In each household, all persons 16 years and older received the questionnaire.

For the United States, we draw on data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a two-wave panel study of a nationally representative sample. The first wave was collected in 1987-88 and the second wave in 1992-94. The National Survey of Families and Households includes interviews with 13,007 respondents. The sample includes a main cross-section of 9,637 households plus an oversampling of African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, single-parent families, families with step-children, cohabiting couples and recently married persons. One adult per household was randomly selected as the primary respondent.

The present study uses data from only one wave of each study. For Germany we used the eighth wave (1991), and for the United States the first wave (1987). The 1991 wave of the GSOEP is used because it includes questions concerning the extended family network of the respondent, including data about the residential proximity to the parents. In this article, we use only the data for the former West Germany. For the sake of comparability, we restricted the samples in one additional way. Cultural and ethnic differences exist in both of the countries that would make interpreting the comparative findings very difficult. Therefore, for Germany we selected only families where the head of the family (the respondent) is a German citizen. This excludes most individuals who are guest workers in Germany, a significant proportion of whom are of Turkish origin. The United States data are restricted to families where the head of household is white³.

Both subsamples used in this study included all respondents who were over 20 years of age, who had at least one living parent, and who had left the parental household. Persons were included who had established their own household or who lived in group quarters – for example, on a military base. Subsequently we constructed dyads for which residential proximity between the child and the parents could be measured. In the case where both parents were alive and lived together in one household the dyad was only coded once. If the father or the mother was deceased, the residential proximity to the surviving mother or father was coded. If the parents did not live in the same household, the farthest distance was coded. There were 3284 dyads for Germany and 4583 dyads for the USA which were included in the analysis. The estimated models are calculated separately for sons and for daughters, including 4320 dyads (1680 for Germany and 2640 for the USA) for the daughter to either both parents or the father or mother and 3547 dyads (1604 for Germany and 1943 for the USA) for the son to either both parents or the father or mother. The dyads were not weighted by the number of siblings each child has. This is because in the data only the residential proximity from the closest

3 We excluded blacks in the US and for example the turkish or italien people in Germany, because the results would become too heterogeneous. From lot of foreign people in Germany the parents live in their native country.

living child to the parents is available and we don't have any information of the other siblings.

3.2 Measures

Dependent variable. For both datasets, the dependent variable „residential proximity to the parents household“ was recoded into a dummy variable: 0= distance to parents home is less than a one-hour car ride; 1=distance to parents' home is greater than a one-hour car ride.⁴ The one-hour distance by car or by bus is a plausible way to distinguish between individuals who are able to have frequent face-to-face contact with one another, such that mutual assistance could be exchanged, and those who because of distance are not able to do so. This grouping is based on Litwak (1985) work on residential proximity between families. He suggests that a one-hour distance is indeed meaningful to parents and children. This is because elderly persons begin to regulate their own driving behaviors; part of that self-regulation is to drive fewer miles per year than other age groups. An hour's drive away is perceived as prohibitively difficult for some older people, which would mean that the adult child would have to drive to the older parent and not vice versa. This would in turn lead to reduced contact.

To calculate the dependent variable, we used information on the geographical proximity between the household of the respondent (a child) and his or her parents. We are therefore unable to compare differences in residential distance among various children. To use a „one hour distance as a measure for a relativ short distance“ appears appropriate because a one hour distance can be driven by car easily. Even if the distance is in the US somewhat different than in Germany, most of daily help, support and contact, if it's necessary or people wish it, can be done within this distance. If the distance is greater, the situation becomes somewhat different. It's not as easy to drive each day so much time back and force.

Independent variables. To examine life-cycle factors, we constructed age-groups, using the respondent's self-reported age to construct these groups. The age categories are 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, and older than 60. (In the analyses below, the category 41-50 serves as the reference category.) It must be acknowledged that age and cohort are confounded in our analysis, and we cannot clearly statistically argue either for the age „effect“ or the cohort „effect“. However, the use of age-groups is an accepted practice in life-course studies drawing on cross-sectional data (Renn, 1987).

To test the influence of education and labor market mobility we used two variables. First a dummy variable is coded to test the influence of the highest level of education. For both data sets, the variable indicates whether a university degree (or college degree in the U.S.) was obtained (0=less than a university/college degree; 1=university/college degree). To measure labor market mobility, a variable representing the socioeconomic status of the respondent's profession for both data sets

4 In the NSFH, the distance variable is calculated in miles. Persons who live less than 51 miles from the parent/s were placed in the „less than one hour“ group.

are used. For the U.S., the socioeconomic status score of Stevens and Hyun Cho was used, which ranges from 13.98 for a winding and twisting machine operator to 90.45 for a law professor. For Germany, the Wegener-Scale was used, ranging from 20.0 for an unskilled blue-collar worker to 186.8 for a medical doctor (Wolf, 1995).

To examine the influence of life events, we included the event of a divorce of the child, and within the older generation at the death of the father or the mother. These events were coded as dummy variables, representing „0“ for never divorced and „1“ for divorced, and „0“ for both parents living and „1“ for one parent deceased. We also created two dummy variables for divorced individuals: Divorced with children, and divorced with no children. We also used a dummy-variable, representing „1“ for not being married and „0“ for being married in the child's generation. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the variables in the analysis.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of variables in the analysis

| Variable | West Germany | | USA | |
|---|--------------|-----------|-------|-----------|
| | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. |
| Age 21 to 30 | .234 | .423 | .262 | .440 |
| Age 31 to 40 | .200 | .400 | .262 | .440 |
| Age 51 to 60 | .163 | .369 | .105 | .307 |
| Older than 60 | .232 | .422 | .226 | .418 |
| College Degree | .102 | .303 | .207 | .405 |
| Socio-economic status | 42.560 | 36.262 | 3.946 | .634 |
| Not Married | .198 | .399 | .131 | .337 |
| Divorced/No Children | .028 | .164 | .028 | .165 |
| Divorced/Children | .028 | .165 | .141 | .348 |
| Only Mother Alive | .178 | .382 | .502 | .500 |
| Only Father Alive | .033 | .178 | .367 | .482 |
| Residential Proximity (Dependent Variable) | .199 | .399 | .393 | .488 |

4. Results

Our hypotheses regarding the residential proximity between the parents' household and the household of the child are tested with logistic regression equations, a model that is most suitable for categorical independent variables (Arminger, Clogg & Sobel, 1995). For both datasets the dependent variable Y „residential proximity to the parents household“ is modeled with the independent variables $X_{i, \dots, n}$. To assess the strength of individual independent variables, we report odds ratios. An odds ratio that is less than one indicates that the independent variable decreases the likelihood of living farther away than one hour, while an odds ratio greater than one indicates an increased likelihood of moving a greater distance away.⁵ An odds

5 Unlike OLS regression, logistic regression does not allow for the calculation of the R^2 statistic. Several alternative measures of predictive efficacy have been proposed in the

ratio lower than one, can be read as a negative influence of the corresponding variable and vice versa an odds ratio greater than one can be read as a positive influence.

Table 2 shows percentage differences for each of the independent variables between persons living less than one hour distant and those living one hour or more distant from parents.

Table 2: Distance between parents and their nearest child (in %)

| Characteristics of Child and Parents | Distance between child and parents | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|------|----------------------------|--------------------------|------|
| | West Germany | | | USA | | |
| | Less Than One Hour Distant | One Hour or More Distant | N | Less Than One Hour Distant | One Hour or More Distant | N |
| Total | 80.0 | 20.0 | 3435 | 60.7 | 39.3 | 4583 |
| Child's education: | | | | | | |
| Less than college degree | 83.2 | 16.8 | 2998 | 67.8 | 32.2 | 3310 |
| College degree or higher | 59.3 | 40.7 | 437 | 42.3 | 57.7 | 1273 |
| Child's Age: | | | | | | |
| 20-30 years | 85.2 | 14.8 | 1099 | 65.1 | 34.9 | 1448 |
| 31-40 years | 80.0 | 20.0 | 1112 | 59.8 | 40.2 | 1763 |
| 41-50 years | 74.8 | 25.2 | 778 | 55.0 | 45.0 | 851 |
| 51-60 years | 76.8 | 23.4 | 384 | 58.3 | 41.7 | 379 |
| 61 years and older | 82.2 | 17.8 | 68 | 68.3 | 31.7 | 142 |
| Marital Status: | | | | | | |
| Divorced/ No Children | 72.7 | 27.3 | 110 | 52.7 | 47.3 | 146 |
| Divorced/ Children | 87.0 | 13.0 | 92 | 66.6 | 33.3 | 715 |
| Widowhood | | | | | | |
| Father deceased | 79.2 | 20.8 | 1108 | 62.0 | 38.0 | 1500 |
| mother deceased | 71.1 | 28.9 | 208 | 52.5 | 47.5 | 394 |

Sources for Germany, German Socioeconomic Panel, Wave 8; for the U.S., National Survey of Families and Households, Wave 1

The logistic regression analysis is presented in Table 3, and shows the effects of the independent variables in our theoretical model on the likelihood of living further than one hour distant from parents. The table provides separate analyses for the U.S. and Germany. It is also divided according to gender, because we anticipated that patterns of residential proximity might differ for men and women.

analyses that follow, we use the Proportional Reduction of Uncertainties (PRU) measure of association. The PRU can be used in logistic regression in much the same way that multiple correlation coefficients are employed in ordinary multiple regression. The PRU provides a measure of the improvement in prediction between a model without independent variables and one with all theoretically important variables included (Long, 1987; Urban, 1993, p. 57). All models were estimated with SAS.

Table 3: Odds Ratios for living more than one hour from parents, for U.S. and West Germany

| Independent Variable | West Germany | | USA | |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Daughters | Sons | Daughters | Sons |
| Intercept | .25*** | .20*** | .32*** | .09*** |
| Age 21 to 30 | .45*** | .45*** | .55* | .78* |
| Age 31 to 40 | .78* | .64*** | .71* | .82 |
| Age 41 to 50 | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| Age 51 to 60 | .92 | .99 | .74* | 1.8 |
| Older than 60 | .40* | 1.12 | .44*** | .6* |
| Less than college Degree | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| College Degree | 2.84*** | 3.28*** | 2.53*** | 2.42*** |
| Socio-Economic Status | 1.1 | 1.2*** | 1.21*** | 1.65*** |
| Married | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| Not Married | 1.41** | 2.02*** | 1.37** | 1.14* |
| Never Divorced | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| Divorced/No Children | 2.43* | 1.30 | 1.00 | 1.85* |
| Divorced/Children | .25** | .47 | .82 | .44*** |
| Mother and father alive | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| Only Mother alive | .9 | 1.0 | .94 | 1.07 |
| Only Father alive | .83 | .52** | 1.63*** | 1.32 |
| -2 LL Zero Model | 1615.6 | 1635.9 | 3519.5 | 2619.2 |
| -2 LL | 1539.3 | 1521.5 | 3346.1 | 2443.8 |
| PRU-Measure | 4.7 | 7.0 | 5.3 | 7.2 |
| N | 1683 | 1606 | 2640 | 1943 |

* $p < .10$ ** $p < .05$ *** $p < .01$ (two tailed tests)

The first five lines of Table 3 provide partial evidence that life cycle stage is related to geographical proximity. For persons in the 21-30 age range, the estimated effects are lower than one, and are highly significant in all groups except sons in the U.S. As predicted, with increasing age the effect is less strong. In the 31-40 age category, the negative effect is found only for German sons and U.S. daughters, and at a lower level of statistical significance. Only one marginally significant relationship was found for the 51-60 age range (for U.S. daughters). In the oldest age group, there is a strong tendency for U.S. daughters to reside close to parents, and a weaker tendency among German daughters and U.S. sons. Thus, as we predicted, the findings show a general pattern in which the younger age groups have a stronger probability of living near parents than the middle-aged reference category (41-50).

Also as predicted, the strongest effect was found for educational level, where the odds ratios range from 2.4 to 2.8 across the four groups. Thus, the higher the level of educational attainment by children, the farther away from parents they tend to live. Consistent with these findings, socioeconomic status was also related to greater distance (although the effects are smaller). Thus, geographic distance does appear to be heavily influenced by demands of employers on individuals, as expressed through the demands for mobility of the labor market.

In terms of being married, persons who are not married live further away from their parents than do persons, who live in a marriage, both in the U.S. and in Ger-

many. Concerning life events, divorce was not related to geographical distance from parents in any of the four groups (with the exception of marginal significance among U.S. sons). Widowhood of the mother also does not have a significant effect on geographical distance. Only widowhood of the father was significantly related to geographical distance. However, this relationship was in the opposite direction from the one we predicted, with German sons and U.S. daughters having a higher probability of living farther away from widowed fathers.

The findings from the international comparison were surprising: The data in general do not support our predicted differences between Germany and the U.S. An examination of the odds ratios shows few consistent patterns, although there are two suggestive findings. First, in the case of socioeconomic status, only daughters in Germany failed to show the predicted relationship with geographic mobility. It may be that Germany's greater support for families allows professional women greater freedom to avoid moving to pursue employment. For example, part-time work as a long-term employment strategy is more institutionalized in Germany than in the U.S. Second, there is a somewhat stronger tendency in the U.S. for persons above the age of 60 to live closer to parents; in particular, sons in the U.S. are twice as likely to do so in this age group (there is also a slight tendency for U.S. daughters in the 51-60 range to live closer to parents). This pattern may point to the impact of greater support for the aged in Germany.

Overall, however, we did not find strong evidence that the differing social welfare system greatly mutes the predicted relationships between geographical proximity and life cycle stage, educational and occupational attainment, and life events. Educational attainment affected individuals almost equally in both countries, while neither divorce nor widowhood of mothers had an important effect in either nation. Other variables showed significant relationships with at least one group in both countries. Further, in analyses not shown here, we created a pooled data set by combining the two databases. Using this pooled data set, we tested country \times independent variable interactions for all variables. No significant interactions were found on any of the variables. Thus, despite the small differences noted in Table 2, we view the hypothesis of national differences due to variations in the social welfare system as not supported.

5. Conclusion

The phase of family life after children have left the parental home has become a significant, and increasingly lengthy period in the adult life course. The present article represents one of the first major attempts to predict geographical distance between adult children and their parents, and to our knowledge the only cross-national analysis of this issue. In our analyses, we have addressed two key questions: What factors influence the distance between parental households and those of adult children? Do national characteristics affect these relationships? These questions are of theoretical and empirical significance.

Taken together, the data provide some support for our theoretical perspective. Geographical distance emerges from the demands for mobility made by organizations and companies, both in the U.S. and in Germany. Professionals experience pressure to distance themselves from the family of origin in both countries, because of the exigencies of the labor market. This is confirmed by the strong findings regarding the influence of educational and occupational attainment on geographical distance.

Conversely, the data on the family life cycle suggest that the needs of dependent members do limit geographic mobility to some degree. The findings indicate that persons in middle age are most likely to live farther away from parents, when dependency needs of both parents and children are likely to be at their lowest point. However, when adult children are younger, and when parents reach the upper limits of the life course, residential proximity increases. It thus appears likely that the pull of the demands of employers is balanced to some degree by dependency on the family.

The lack of significant differences between the U.S. and Germany is a particularly interesting finding. The most likely explanation is that, as two industrialized societies, both countries have experienced similar demands of corporate actors upon individuals. Future research on this topic is greatly needed, because the possible implications of this finding are striking. The impact of social welfare service provision on family life has been extensively debated in the U.S., and it is sometimes suggested that such services loosen family obligations. Thus, Germany's greater provision of assistance to its citizens would be interpreted according to this perspective as decreasing the importance of the family in the lives of individuals. However, the data presented in this paper do not support this view. In Germany as in the U.S., education is strongly related to geographic distance, and positions in the life cycle that imply greater dependency predict geographical proximity. Additional cross-national comparisons, using related dependent variables (for example, co-residence or financial dependency) are needed to shed additional light on this issue.

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